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P 091129Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5294
INFO RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0227
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0307
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 1122
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1890
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0442
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0226
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 1213
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0482

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000330

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: MASS FIRING OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TEACHERS
REF: A. KIGALI 325

[1](#)B. KIGALI 323
[1](#)C. KIGALI 259

Classified By: Amb. Arietti for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 142 of their members had been fired from their jobs as teachers after refusing to participate in nation-wide government solidarity camps. They reported increased difficulties with the government since public criticism by the new Minister of State for Education and feared future firings and reversals of previous positive gains in their relations with local government officials. The Ministers of Local Government and Finance acknowledged to the Ambassador that the Government of Rwanda (GOR) needs to "review the situation." End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) officials told emboffs May 8 that 142 of their members had been fired from their jobs as teachers after refusing to participate on religious grounds in "Intorero," a series of nation-wide teacher solidarity camps intended to combat "genocide ideology." (Note: Jehovah's Witnesses take a "neutrality stance" toward affirmations of allegiance to governments). Church officials stated 316 Jehovah's Witness teachers had refused to participate in the camps outright, and another 94 took part for only a certain portion, although a few others may have stayed for the entire camp program. The JWs found quasi-military marches, the singing of the national anthem, loyalty pledges to the government, and other "political" requirements to be inconsistent with their religious beliefs. In several locales camp participants were asked to state their political affiliations, and those not already members of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) were strongly encouraged to join.

[1](#)3. (C) Two female JW teachers, who had been arrested and held in prison for their refusal to go to the camp, have since been released (ref A). Many of the fired teachers, church officials reported, received letters from their school directors dismissing them on orders from the Minister of State for Education, while others were simply let go (emboffs were shown several such letters to that effect). In ten cases school directors conducted what were described as humiliating public dismissals of teachers in front of assembled students and then locked them out of their classrooms.

[1](#)4. (C) JW officials feared the mass firing would have a spill-over effect if local officials viewed this development as "permission" to take further action against Jehovah's Witnesses. As examples of what might be seen as increasing

hostility to their members, they cited a May 7 arrest of 13 JW's by local defense forces, supposedly for non-participation in armed night patrols, and the late April expulsion from school of 20 Jehovah's Witness youth for not singing the national anthem (night patrols and anthem-singing being two issues on which the JW's had generally won the indulgence of local authorities).

¶5. (C) JW officials met with Minister of Local Government Protais Musoni April 28 to discuss the firings and to attempt to reach a compromise on Intorero participation. They proposed that JW members attend camps, but be exempt from some portions of their programs (anthem singing, military-style drills, or anything they considered "political"). JW officials said Musoni described Intorero as Q"political"). JW officials said Musoni described Intorero as a "state-sponsored instrument to help Rwandan society," and replied that Jehovah's Witnesses would not be exempt from taking part in any portion of the programs.

¶6. (C) Ambassador spoke with Protais Musoni May 8 to discuss the teacher firings. Musoni agreed the GOR should not "single out" the JW's, and acknowledged that, having reached accommodations with the JW's on other issues, the GOR should strive to do so again regarding the teacher solidarity camps. In an earlier conversation with Finance Minister James Musoni, the Finance Minister said that "if we have mishandled the Jehovah Witnesses, we need to look into it."

¶7. (C) Comment. Jehovah's Witnesses experienced concrete improvements in their relationship with the government in 2007, with steadily decreasing incidents of arrest or harassment, and a reversal of previous bans on building permits for their Kingdom Halls. The newly-appointed Minister of State for Education, however, has a reputation for being unfriendly to the JW's, and more firings of teachers may follow. The Ambassador has engaged senior government officials and will follow up with the Minister of State for Education on the firings. End comment.

ARIETTI